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How I Managed My Estate

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HOW I MANAGED AND IMPROVED MY ESTATE.

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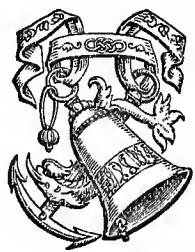

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GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET
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CHOICE OF AN ESTATE.

HOW I MANAGED AND IMPROVED MY ESTATE.

Chapter I.

CHOICE OF AN ESTATE.

SOME twenty years ago, having obtained the means of satisfying my longing to return to country life, in which I had been mostly bred, I gave up my London occupations and looked about for a piece of land which would suit me; and, after several journeys into different parts of Sussex, my favourite county, I found an estate, or rather two contiguous estates, just after my mind. I gave £14,000 for them; farmed them and managed the wood-

lands almost entirely myself, obtaining during the whole time I held the land considerably higher returns than I could have obtained in rent; sold a thousand pounds' worth of timber; spent about £5,500 on improving house and land; and within fifteen years afterwards had parted with the place, which I had made too grand for my use, for £27,000: the whole transaction leaving me £9,500 richer than I was before in money, and richer also in a great deal of pleasant experience and country knowledge, some of which it may be worth while to note down.

I believe that the gentleman from whom I bought the greater part of the land had never even seen it. He was one of the wealthiest men in England, and had large estates in other counties; and, in selling this far-outlying bit, did so at an estimate of its mere agricultural value and the amount of the timber it carried.

I saw at a glance that, with its deep and beautifully wooded ravines, its superb views, its mile and a half of trout-stream, and its neighbourhood to London, I could not make a mistake in buying it at agricultural value; so did so at once. And, finding that the

estate which ran for about a mile alongside of it on the other side of the turnpike-road, and which had on it a house in which I could live, was for sale, I at once bought that also; though I had to pay much more for it, in proportion to what I thought its real value, than I gave for the first purchase.

The chief picturesque feature of this second portion of my bargain was a long wooded dell, or "ghyll", (as it is called in Sussex as well as in the north), not nearly so striking, indeed, as the ravine which ran parallel to it, about a mile off, on the other side of the high-road, but still very beautiful, and with about half-a-mile of trout-stream in the bottom.

The house upon it had been a very old farm-house of large size; but the man who had inhabited and possessed it before me had added a vulgar stucco front to it and raised a large pile of ill-built stabling just before the principal face. The old farm-buildings remained close to the house, the farm-yard coming up to its very walls. There was no view from its windows, all the space in front being choked with timber.

Between the stables and farm-buildings, and at a distance of about 200 yards from the

front, was a deep damp depression of about two acres, filled with such scraggy underwood as would grow in it. From this first depression the ground fell away, in a series of unequal hollows, which at once suggested fish-ponds to my mind, to the "ghyll;" further on lay field after field of beautifully modulated ground, but so bound in and blinded with thickly timbered "shaws" that it was impossible to guess whether or not there might be beyond them a view of the great line of airy South Downs which was the chief grace of the views from the other property.

What gave the chief character, at the time of my purchase, to this part of the estate, was the approach to the house by a winding avenue, about a quarter of a mile long, of old oaks, having a fine clear fish-pond of about an acre in extent in a little oak wood alongside, with a pretty wooded islet in the midst of it. A tolerably good stone-built lodge stood at the junction of the avenue and the high road. Altogether, the spot was well suited for a mansion of "county" rank, though at the time I had no thought of constructing one there.

This part of the property, about 120 acres,

being all in hand, together with about 170 acres of woods, upon my first purchase, I resolved to farm and manage myself, leaving one farm of about 100 acres, and several small holdings of from four to twenty acres, in the hands of their then tenants.

I made acquaintance with my principal tenant one Sunday morning. I found him mending a wheel in his cart-shed. He had inherited the tenancy of the farm from his father, and held it at a rent of considerably less than half its value, as I found from offers which were made to me by persons in the neighbourhood, who rightly guessed that I should soon have to turn him out of his tenancy. It was the old story. Having to pay a ridiculously low rent, he had found himself unable to pay any, and had for years satisfied his late invisible landlord by sending in annually a bill for fencing and ditching the woods which amounted to or exceeded his nominal rent.

The house belonging to this farm was a massive stone building of Tudor times, exceedingly out of repair. It had once been the house of one of the ironmasters of the district, at the time Sussex was a great iron-

producing county. Most of the landholders a hundred and fifty years ago seem to have been ironmasters; traces of smelting-works being scattered all over the county, and still yielding valuable stores of "clinkers," which are saleable at high rates to the parish authorities for roads. I found mines of these clinkers on my own land, used them largely for my own purposes, and sold still larger quantities for as much as 4*s*. a yard.

In these diggings I found one or two spiked cannon-balls and other antiquities, which I gave to a local museum, and on one occasion turned up a slab of iron weighing about a quarter of a ton. Those great tracts of sandy desert called Ashdown and St. Leonards Forests were, almost within the memory of living men, real forests; but they were denuded of their trees for the use of these iron-furnaces, which would probably still be alight but for the want of fuel, iron ore of fine quality being yet abundant a very little way below the surface.

About a mile of the boundary of my estate, which lay well together and was more than four miles round, was skirted by a part of Ashdown Forest, on which several squatters

had settled and established proprietorial rights by long occupation. I shortly found that these people were inconvenient neighbours. They were not content with poaching my woods, which lay adjacent to their holdings, but they were in the habit of cutting them down.

On one occasion, when I was rambling in one of these woods, I was surprised to see a space of about a quarter of an acre of what had been thriving underwood looking very sickly and drooping; and found on examination that "bats" of six or eight feet had been cut from the lower portions of the stems, and the tops left standing in their places, so that no one could have noticed the theft until the leaves had begun to wither. These woods abounded with dogwood, which is very valuable for making gunpowder—a faggot selling, if I remember rightly, for two shillings. I found it very difficult to retain this source of revenue for my own use.

I was somewhat surprised, when I first came into possession, at receiving from one or two of these my humble neighbours offers of absurdly high rent for patches of two or three acres of very poor grass-land. I afterwards found that these were poachers, who,

if they could have obtained such "shootings," would, as others of their brethren did, have taken out licences regularly and defied game-keepers or policemen to prove that the game found on their persons had not been lawfully come by.

In other respects I found these people very simple, amiable, and companionable persons. As Christianity did not appear to have ever been promulgated among the "foresters," they carried out "the good old rule, the simple plan," without any derangement of conscience or loss of self-respect. They paid their fines or went to prison for poaching or wood-stealing, without entertaining the least animosity against those who subjected them to these inconveniences. A youth whom I had imprisoned for a fortnight for being found on my land with a lot of young partridges in his pocket, came quite cheerfully to ask work of me the morning after his release; and I found that as a rule there was a good-humoured understanding of this "take and give" kind between the peasants or squatters and the proprietors of the soil.

This mutual good feeling extended itself even to the magisterial presence and the

intercourse of keepers and poachers. A man who was required to pay fine and costs to the amount of £3 17*s.* for shooting my pheasants, paid it saying, "Quite fair, your worship; I have had sixty head off Mr. ——'s land this year;" and as the man who looked after my shooting was chatting with a friend walking alongside a cart on the high-road, the latter lifted a sack and showed a heap of game, saying, "Them be your birds, and there's the white un," pointing to a white pheasant which I had often seen in the woods.

The peculiar views of the squatters with regard to property did not, however, go beyond game and wood. I was never robbed by them in any other way. While I was remodelling my house and numbers of them were constantly employed as labourers, many tons of old sheet-lead were left openly exposed to theft in the farm-yard during many months; but not a pound of it was taken, though its value was, of course, well known.

The foresters had another moral peculiarity. They were for the most part always ready to sell "affidavies," made to the fashion desired by the purchaser, at extremely low prices: four times less, in fact, than the Aston figure.

For example, if the bailiff of a neighbouring owner wished to secure the high hedge of a shaw of the next proprietor, as a defence against the wind, and the proof of the proprietorship lay, not in the often carelessly drawn up plans of the estate, but in long tradition maintained by the cutting of the hedge and making of the ditch by the owner, such bailiff had only to pay half-a-crown each to two or three old foresters, and they would solemnly testify to the fact, that although the hedge and ditch had certainly been made the last time by the person asserting possession, yet that had been by mistake, for they themselves had made the ditch and hedge the time before, perhaps twenty-five years back, for the owner whose bailiff now required the protection of the hedge. If the person whose property was so attacked was unprepared to use similar means of defence, there was nothing for him to do but to "cave in."

As with the poaching and wood-stealing, there was nothing unconscientious or underhand in the matter. And this Arcadian simplicity seems, as I have said, to have been due to the almost total absence of a soul-disturbing faith. Baptism was not commonly

practised among even the more settled of the country-folk. My principal tenant could only be persuaded by my wife to have his child christened upon its being represented to him that, at all events, no harm would come of it, and on condition that she would be at the trouble of getting the parson to come from a distance to do it; and when I asked my ploughman if he had had his baby baptized, his answer was, "No, I don't hold with baptism; it never did me no good."

UNDERWOODS.

Chapter II.

UNDERWOODS.

IN Sussex, which is perhaps the most thickly wooded county in England, it is the custom, as elsewhere, for landed proprietors to keep the bulk of the woods in their own hands. But tenants of Sussex farms, which in most cases contain a certain extent of hop-land (usually in the proportion of about one acre in twelve or fifteen), are commonly allowed to hold a piece of wood-land sufficient to supply them with hop-poles. Each acre of hops (of 1,250 "hills" to the acre) requires 3,750 poles; and these in ordinary farms, where boiling in creosote is not practised,

have to be entirely renewed once in four or five years; the time varying with the more or less durable nature of the poles, according as they consist of larch, oak, chestnut, ash, or birch: the Sussex woods commonly consisting mainly of the four last, larch scarcely ever appearing as hop-poles, except on especially highly cultivated farms, on account of their greater cost. For larch-poles do not grow crop after crop from "stubs" as the other kinds do, but have to be planted on new ground every ten or twelve years. Growing larch-poles is sometimes a very profitable thing, a single acre having been known to bear a crop of twelve years' growth worth £120; but capital and long waiting are required for their culture, and for these Sussex farmers are not famous.

There can be no fixed proportion, on Sussex farms, between wood-land and hops; for one acre of wood-land may grow ten times as many poles as another, according to its freedom from or embarrassment by larger timber, the number and health of the "stubs," and the nature of the wood. Ash and chestnut give by far the most abundant cuttings. In one wood I know there is about half an acre of

unmixed ash which gives more poles than any five acres of the remainder.

Sussex woods are for the most part very ill-kept up, usually not yielding half, or even a quarter, of the timber and underwood which they might be made to yield. From such observations as I have been able to make, I should say that in this county, as a rule, at least three or four acres of woods are required for the supply of poles for one acre of hops.

The tenant has, of course, no control over the timber either of his hedgerows, "shaws," or woods. This remains, together with the bulk of the wood-lands, in the hands of the proprietor; and, if he indulges in the delightful occupation of looking after his own interests, there can be no part of his property capable of giving him more pleasure and amusement. In the management of the home-farm he is compelled to leave much to the skill and still more to the honesty of his bailiff, who is likely, if he is good for much, to be jealous of the master's interference to any great extent in such things as cropping the land, cattle-feeding, and the like; and to whose honesty the proprietor is obliged to trust all, or nearly all, sale transactions. But

it is not so with the wood-lands, for the planting and sale of the produce of which no bailiff or woodreeve is necessary, unless the woods are very large in extent and the master very lazy in acquiring the little necessary knowledge and very indifferent to the amount of the income returned. A gentleman might easily and profitably superintend personally the planting-up, draining, path and road-making, and timber measuring and selling, upon 500 acres of wood—which in Sussex would usually indicate an estate of perhaps 2,000 acres—without any assistance, and with little more knowledge than a man of good sense picks up, almost without being aware of it, by living in the country and on his own land. My 170 acres of woods gave me almost daily occupation during each late autumn, winter, and early spring—that half of the year in which nearly all land operations go on most briskly.

These woods had been long neglected. They carried only four thousand pounds' worth of timber upon ground which might have borne ten times as much; the underwoods had been cut, crop after crop, at the usual intervals of ten or twelve years, without

any proper supervision to secure that a sufficient number of "tillers" should be left for future timber. It is a rule, when patches of underwood are sold, that the purchaser cuts it down, but leaves all trees which may have sown themselves since the last cutting standing; and, should there not be enough of these seedlings to supply the gaps in the large timber, then a healthy shoot from a "stub" should be left here and there; but my woods consisted wholly of more or less ripe timber and underwood, and there were therefore large planting operations before me.

The underwood also had suffered greatly by neglect. Though mostly standing upon inclines, and therefore easily drained, the old trenches had not been cleared for fifty years or more, and could scarcely be traced; and much ground which ought to have borne good crops of ash or chestnut had run into willows, poor birch, stray dogwood, and other marsh-loving growth. The roads for carrying cut timber, if ever there had been any, had disappeared; so that whenever timber had been felled (and in Sussex it is the custom to fell the fully ripe trees every time the undergrowth is cut) the "stubs" had been damaged by

horses, cart-wheels, and the heavy trunks which were dragged over them at random.

Altogether, these woods—though as beautiful as could be wished to look upon (for outside, a wood looks much the same whether it bears £40 or £400 an acre in timber), and though better as pleasure-grounds and for sport than if the planting were perfect—afforded as much room for improvement as heart could desire; and I set about it in earnest as soon as I came into possession. I made timber-roads through the larger woods. This is a simple work, consisting merely in the formation of wide alleys by the removal of trees and the roots of the undergrowth.

The drainage I found very costly; for, the ground being uneven, the open trenches had often to be made very deep. I therefore drained only the worst spots. Planting could, of course, only be done as spaces of ground were cleared by the annual cutting of the underwood—that is, on my ground, at the rate of from ten to twenty acres a year.

During my period of possession I planted about 120,000 forest trees. This sounds like a great undertaking; but it was really a much less portentous thing than those may imagine

who would infer that, after thirty years or so, I should have found myself, in return for a commensurate outlay, the proprietor of that number of well-grown timber-trunks, in addition to those already standing in my woods.

In planting up old underwoods, at least five plants out of ten expire under the difficulties of their position. When the "stubs" are wide apart, the ground is usually choked with rank grass and briars, which cannot be kept down, and which stifle all but the strongest young trees before they are able to strike their roots well and get their heads into the air. When the growth of underwood is comparatively thick, and there are consequently no grass or brambles, the same result is produced by the growth of the original underwood itself, which in a couple of years overtops and excludes from the needful air and light all but the most sturdy youngsters.

Nor is the expense of planting such a number of trees anything like what the reformers of our land laws and other persons of exclusively urban experience might suppose. For planting up underwoods, larch, ash, and chestnut (oak, birch, and beech are very seldom used) should be about four feet high;

and for such plants you pay at the best forest nurseries—such as Messrs. Wood's, of Maresfield—from 25*s.* to 30*s.* a thousand. An active man is able to plant, if I remember rightly, from seven hundred to a thousand a day.

It is of no use to plant underwoods with trees of larger growth than I have mentioned. They would be more likely to be suffocated than the smaller ones; for a year's addition to the age of a plant renders it much less able to strike its roots freely. A larch of two feet high, planted in the open, would probably soon overtake one of five or six feet, if planted beside it and at the same time. Of all trees ash is the most profitable to plant for underwood, if the soil be rich and not too dry or damp; for it grows so fast that it can, in favourable circumstances, be cut over twice, while other kinds of wood only give one crop. I had a plot of ash on a piece of rich ground, that gave a crop of poles every five years, which was worth at the rate of at least £40 an acre. But this was a rarity.

Successful planting requires close and intelligent supervision. When left to an underling, twice as many trees die as when the

vork is properly seen to, especially if the vork is "piece-work"—that is, paid for by he number of trees planted. I found that ıothing but my almost constant attendance on he spot could prevent the planters from doing nore than take out a "spit" of earth, stick he tree in one side of the hole, and chuck the ump of earth back again, settling it with one ›r two stamps of the heel. Again, if the natter is left to the ordinary labourer, thou-ands of plants, lying ready for planting, may ›e killed in one night of frost or one day of lry east-wind, by neglect of the precaution of overing them with loose earth or at least vith a sack or two.

Among the many adversities to which 'oung plantations are subject, the neighbour-ıood of much ground-game is one of the vorst. I have had a larch plantation entirely lestroyed in one hard winter by being barked ›y rabbits or hares. Squirrels are also bad nemies to fir plantations; but they attack he buds. I could never quite subdue the 'round-game, though I have sometimes killed hundred head in one day.

All planting operations, whether for under-'ood or large timber, are a work of consider-

able time. Underwoods do not begin really to pay until about twenty-six years after planting—that is to say, at the third cutting. The first cutting—though this valuable point is commonly omitted—should be two years after planting, in order to force the young stubs to send up several shoots instead of one.

This first cutting is practicable only in a perfectly new plantation, or where the old underwood is so thin that it may be all cut over again, together with the new plants, two years after a crop of underwood has been taken. This, of course, involves a loss of two years' growth in the next crop; but I found by experience that this sacrifice was well worth making, not only because it allowed of the cutting of the young plants, but still more on account of the immense advantage they thus obtained from the admission of light and air, the want of which is so fatal to the new trees planted among underwood.

TIMBER.

Chapter III.

TIMBER.

THERE are three principal points to be regarded in the management of the large timber of an estate—ornament, profit, and the way in which it affects the profit of underwoods; and as my timber was thick where it should have been thin, and thin where it should have been thick, I was compelled to consider these points well. The planting of thin wood for timber is involved in planting up the underwoods; the healthiest young trees being left, when the first crop of underwood is cut, at intervals of from 20 ft. to 25 ft. apart. The relative values of timber and underwood differ greatly

in different parts of the country. In hop-growing counties like Sussex the underwoods are of more consequence than the timber; and therefore, as a rule, the Sussex woods do not bear much more timber than is necessary to make them look like woods. Nothing could look more rich and beautiful than my woods, yet the large timber averaged only about £24 an acre. An acre of land, however, under the best circumstances of soil and aspect, and if planted all at once and kept duly thinned, ought to carry eighty oak-trees, worth £10 each, at the end of about fifty or sixty years: that is to say, the crop would be worth £800.

Such crops have been in England; but they will probably never be again, for no one in his senses would dream, in a state of political instability like ours, of planting any of his land in this way. Oak timber is, indeed, quickly disappearing, and fast-growing "soft wood" taking its place. An oak tree which at fifty years might be worth £10 is probably not worth above a shilling at twenty; but fir-poles are useful at all stages of their growth. People in general do not know how quickly the destruction of oak is going on, for the

reasons I have just noted: there is little difference in external appearance between an oak wood worth £24 an acre and one worth £800.

Sussex oak rarely grows large, but in quality it is the finest in England. I have seldom seen a Sussex oak so large as one which grew on my ground. It was thirteen feet round; but this would not be a great size in some parts of the country. Not only is Sussex oak exceedingly sound and hard, but it is fast-growing during the comparatively brief period it takes to ripen in this county. I felled one oak which was more than seven feet round at five feet from the earth, and there were only thirty-five rings of annual growth in it; two or three of these rings indicating a growth of more than two inches in the diameter of the tree in one year. In some years the growth of timber, as tested thus by the rings, is three or four times as great as it is in others.

Very interesting statistics, concerning the growth of timber and its relation to weather and soil and other conditions, might be arrived at by the simple method of collecting and polishing disks out of the trunks of various

trees, dating the rings and comparing their breadth with the meteorological records of each year. For aught that I know, this may have been done in Germany, where woodcraft is a science; but I have never heard of its having been even suggested.

The action of ivy in diminishing the size of timber is very great. A heavily ivy-bound oak loses about one-third of its natural power of expansion. Few woodreeves attend to this. I did so myself, going through the woods with a bill-hook and chopping through the ivy stems carefully, so that the bark of the tree should not suffer, as I found it often did when I left this work to others.

Another work I found it expedient to take into my own hands was the measuring of the timber. The usual way, I found, was for the woodreeve or bailiff and the timber merchant to go over the timber together, the merchant measuring the "girth" with his own string, and the bailiff taking note of the size and marking the trees. In selling some timber, I myself accompanied the party, and observed that there were several disadvantages in this plan. The merchant's measuring-string was an old and very much frayed cord, which

would stretch two or three inches in as many feet if tightened strongly; as I fancied that it was when applied to the tree, but not when applied to the measuring rod or line. Again, there was generally a dispute about the quantity of timber in the "head" of the tree—that is to say, above the point at which the "girth" of the trunk is seriously diminished by the departure of the first large branch. This part of the tree, which often contains a considerable proportion of the whole contents, is always measured by sight; and the eyes of the merchant generally saw less timber than those of the bailiff did. So I resolved to dispense, in measuring and setting value on the timber, alike with bailiff and merchant. I went through the woods with someone to hold my measuring rod—a lath of eighteen or twenty feet long, used to ascertain the height of the main trunk when it is above reach—and the little sliding-rule which gives the cubic contents of the tree from the measure of the circumference; marked the trees, put the numbers and sizes in my note-book, set my own price upon them, and found that I had never any difficulty in getting it.

Not only did I thus sell the timber at my

own measurement, but I found that, somehow or other, timber-buyers would always give me some 25 per cent. more than they gave to big proprietors in the neighbourhood, who left the transaction wholly in the hands of their reeves. I never had any personal haggling or any other direct communication with buyers. I gave my bailiff my notes of measurement and price, and the merchant took or refused the offer as pleased him best. The price of standing oak, at the time I am writing of, was about 3*s.* 6*d.* a foot, but I believe that it is less now; not, probably, through any legitimate fall in its value, but through a better understanding—such as now prevails among butchers—between the purchasers of timber.

A ripe Sussex oak seldom exceeds in its contents a "load" of fifty cubic feet. By the time it has reached that size, in my part of the county at least, of which the substratum is the "Hastings sandstone," its roots are commonly checked and probably more or less poisoned by the "iron pan," which usually intervenes between the soil and the rock. An intelligent and somewhat practised eye is required to decide upon the fitness of an oak for felling. A tree with only ten feet of timber in it may

have quite done growing, while another of five times the contents may be putting on a great bulk of wood every season.

A "ripe" tree has always a "stodgy" appearance, especially about the topmost branches, among which small leafless twigs will begin to show themselves. If the work of selecting trees for felling be left to subordinates, the biggest, not the ripest, trees will generally be chosen. But this involves very serious loss; for the larger a tree is the more wood it will put on every year, if it is still "growing;" and, since an oak is usually not timber at all until it is twenty-five or thirty years old, every additional year's growth, up to fifty to sixty years of its age, ought to be reckoned as containing two years of its entire increase.

Another point requiring the eye of the master is the thinning of trees when they stand too close together for free growth. I found this a serious problem sometimes. There were belts of Scotch firs, spruce, and larch extending for about half a mile on either side of the high road. They had been planted about fifty years before I came into possession, and had never been properly thinned. They

had therefore run up to a great height; but three out of four of them were fit only for scaffold-poles. The stronger trees would have still grown into good bulk had it been safe to thin them; but I found it best to leave them alone, for I had quite ruined a two-acre plantation of similar trees by the attempt. The mass of tall thin trees was able to resist the south-westerly storms only so long as it stood against them altogether. As soon as I had removed a few of the trees from one corner, the wind got in among the rest; and the whole plantation had to be felled, much to the disfigurement of that part of the estate and of the view from the house.

There are comparatively very few well-timbered woods in Sussex. They are commonly either grievously under-timbered or as grievously over-timbered. One healthy tree, fifty or sixty years old, standing with a clear space of twenty-five feet about it, will probably be worth ten times as much as ten trees growing together upon an equal area. When a public road runs through an estate, it is a considerable point of economy as well as beauty that belts of timber should run alongside of it. The trees throw their roots to the centre of

the road, and utilize the ground as effectually as if it formed part of the estate. A mile of road means probably five acres of land, and these may be considered as being practically added to the property by timber so planted. I acted upon this consideration in my planting operations. A stream, like a road, may be made very productive in timber. The white poplar sells at a high price, and grows at a wonderful rate in good soil and near a stream in a sheltered position. I sold one, only thirty-five years old, for £10; but I did not plant any, because they spoil the look of the adjacent timber, soon overtopping and dwarfing all other trees with their great sparse-leaved grey heads.

Grubbing timber is a matter of considerable importance in the management of a heavily wooded estate—especially at this time, when everything tends to render the retention of woods immediately unprofitable, and we see grubbing operations going on everywhere on a large scale. The process will not improbably, and at no distant period, end in practically denuding England of its woods, and in changing its climate very much for the worse; as has already happened in large tracts of

Spain and other countries,—tracts which have been converted into deserts by the loss of the moisture-absorbing and moisture-supplying power of forests.

This fatal wood-destroying process received a strong impulse from the strange and most ignorant legislation in the matter of woodlands some dozen years ago. I remember well the character of the debate, though I do not remember the year of it. It ended in rating woodlands—which, for good reasons, had not been rated before—at the agricultural value of the circumjacent land which was under culture. Had a single sensible woodreeve been among the members, he could have turned the debate. He could have told the House that many thousands of acres of woodlands do not pay one penny to the proprietors, being in such low condition that they do not return the expense of hedging and ditching. "Why," the inveterate Cockney would have asked, "not put them in better condition?" Because it involves a large outlay, for which not a farthing can be expected to come back for at least twenty-five years, at the end of which no one knows what will have become of the land. "Why," responds the Land Re-

former, "not grub your unprofitable woods and put them under the plough?" Because, answers the woodman, to do so would cost, in many cases, the fee-simple of the land, of which in many parts of Sussex the agricultural value is not £10; and, furthermore, because a large proportion of woodlands is upon hill-sides and rough ravines, old quarries or gullies, or other uneven places, where nothing else would grow.

But there was no woodreeve in the House of Commons, and so the English woods were voted to destruction.

BUILDING AND QUARRYING.

Chapter IV.

BUILDING AND QUARRYING.

I HAVE said that there was a good-sized house upon my estate. It had been originally a very old farmhouse, and a previous proprietor had made ill-built additions and a vulgar stucco front. This annoyed me so much that I determined to give the front a new stone facing; and I consulted a friendly architect about the expense, including two wings with five new rooms. He estimated the cost of this at seven hundred and fifty pounds. It really cost about three thousand, and would have cost a great deal more had I not had the luck to discover a quarry of ex-

ceedingly fine stone in the very farmyard that adjoined the building.

Very soon after the work had gone too far to be stopped, I discovered to what I had unwittingly committed myself; the new front necessarily involving a new roof, and the new roof necessarily involving new walls right through the middle of the house in order to support it. As soon, too, as the new building had risen a few feet above ground, I saw that the present surroundings of the house must be swept away, and the farm-buildings and stabling removed to a distance and out of sight, and gardens and terraces made, at a cost of nearly two thousand pounds more, unless my previous expense upon the house was to result in a ridiculous incongruity and an unsaleable condition of the estate. My ready-money resources having been narrowed by the purchase of the land, I resolved to reduce this new expense, as far as possible, by superintending the details of the work myself. Having made some study, as an amateur, of architecture and building, and having discovered in other ways the importance of knowing the cost prices of materials and work, I resolved to have no master-builder

but myself; and, by the help of a clever mason, who acted under me and the architect as foreman, I carried this resolve to the end, saving thereby a very large proportion of what would otherwise have been the outlay, and getting the work much better done; so that, in the end, when I got a great nobleman's land agent from the other end of the county to come and value what I had done, he almost refused to believe that the work had been executed for the cost, and set the valuation at a much higher figure.

It had been calculated that the walls of the old stabling—a large two-storied building—would go far to supply the stone for the walls of the house; and that the larger stones for mullions, cornices, and other worked masonry, alone would have to be got out of a quarry some miles off. But it soon appeared that the stones of the stables, when they had been reworked at the edges, would go but a little way, and that the expenses of carrying the large stones five or six miles through the roughest of Sussex lanes would alone add hundreds of pounds to the cost of the building.

The house itself stood upon a rock, and the farmyard close by was entirely paved

with the smooth living rock; but all experts, quarrymen and others, assured me that stone fit for fine mason-work was never found near the surface, and that it was a thousand to one if there were any such stone under the surface in any given spot. Having always, however, been suspicious of experts, I resolved to try. The experiment would not cost above £10, and if it succeeded it might save me a thousand.

Accordingly I had two square shafts, each about four feet deep, and large enough to admit a man sitting with his stone-saw, sunk in the solid rock, leaving between them a clear block of about three or four feet wide and six apart. The stone-sawyer, sitting in one hole with room for the end of his saw in the other, sawed down the sides of the great mass between the shafts; the block was then loosened by wedges from its bed, and brought up to the top with much difficulty and labour, by the insertion of wedge upon wedge, and wooden block upon wooden block, each insertion raising the stone perhaps half an inch at a time.

After about a fortnight's work the great block stood clear out. Its bare sides, almost

polished by the saw, did not show a single flaw or "bed;" the experts pronounced it the finest stone that had been seen in that part of Sussex; and that they did not exaggerate much was afterwards proved by the fact that, as long as my quarry was open, the stone was bought, at almost any price I chose to name, by the builders of mansions and church and school restorers for many miles round.

After the first two shafts had been sunk the difficulty and expense of quarrying diminished rapidly; each additional pair of shafts enabling the sawyer to cut out six or eight times as much as lay between the original pair. The stone was perfectly fine and even in texture and colour, very hard, and in such large masses—one weighed sixteen tons—that I had it used not only for the long and heavy moulded work of the exterior, but for large Tudor carved chimney-pieces, for which Caen stone was to have been employed.

When my house, terraces, etc., were finished, and I filled up the quarry, the masons and quarrymen talked as if I were closing a gold-mine; but there was no help for it, for the yawning gulf lay just under the walls of the

building. I thought, indeed, that I might find this bed of treasure extending to some distance, and accordingly opened the rock at one or two other places not very far from the house; but the stone found in these spots was like all the rest for miles round, giving plenty of "walling stuff"—*i.e.*, blocks of a cubic foot or so in size—but nothing large enough for "dressed work."

Before closing the quarry, I thought it well to get out a large number of blocks, each containing about thirty cubic feet, for future contingencies; and I found them of the greatest use in another addition which I made to the house about eight years afterwards.

I saved money in many ways, by not only closely superintending, but sometimes taking part in the work. For example, when the workmen were pulling down the stabling, I observed that they not only lost an immense deal of time by lifting each stone from its bed with chisel and hammer, but that by this process they broke the edges of the stones to such an extent that the "re-bedding" of them reduced them sometimes to half their size. I expostulated; but they answered that, if

the walls were thrown down by levers, as I proposed, much more stone would be wasted by breakage. Therefore one day, as soon as the men had gone to dinner, I took a crowbar and pulled down more wall in an hour than each man was levelling in a day; and though here and there a stone was fractured, the loss was far less than had been caused by the chisel. There was no replying to the fact; and the rest of the work was done as I wished it to be.

I saved also a great deal by measuring the work which was done daily by each mason, and directing the foreman at the end of each week to pay off every man who had not done his duty. I had for a considerable time more than fifty men at work, building and quarrying; but I found I never made myself unpopular by interference where I was right. The only disfavour I earned was by one or two attempts at personal kindness, which my foreman warned me would not be understood, but certainly attributed to some underhand motive.

The men—the best of them were from London—were for the most part very honest and honourable from their point of view, but

from mine sometimes very unintelligible. For example, one of the London masons had brought down his wife, who was in a consumption, for the good of the air. She died in one of my cottages; the man went about his work next day with tears in his eyes, and was further distressed by having no money in hand to bury her. I told the foreman to offer him the loan of £5, to be repaid at his convenience. He accepted it; but never said a word of thanks either to me or through the foreman. But, some time after his job was finished and he had left for I know not where, I received back the money.

The London workmen, who received 8*s*. a day, seemed to have a certain standard of their own as to the quantity of work which should be turned out by each hand; and I found that one or two country masons and "wallers," who received half that sum, and when alone did twice the work, seemed under some tacit compulsion not to do more than their fellows did, so long as they worked with them; so that plain walling, which had cost me about 18*s*. a "square" of 100 feet before the London men came, cost about £3 a square during their stay, though it fell again

to the lower rate as soon as the country workmen laboured by themselves.

The difference in the cost of "dressed" work was still greater. My country mason cut out of the block, worked, and "set" a chamfered stone coping to many hundreds of feet of terrace-wall at the rate of $7\frac{1}{2}d.$ a foot "run." The London masons did about fifty feet of precisely the same work, and it came to 2*s.* 6*d.* a foot, or exactly four times as much. A good deal of the plainer dressed work of the house might have been done by this man; but the London men, on account of some rule or other of their union, would not let him work with them except as a "waller." The London men, however, were indispensable for the more difficult sort of moulded stonework; so they were obliged to have all the mason's work proper.

I am almost afraid to give further examples of the difference between regular builders' prices and the cost of jobs I got done by my country mason, whom I kept almost constantly employed for some years, and who was quite happy, when he worked by himself with one or two subordinates, if he could make out wages of 4*s.* a day. He did the removing

and rebuilding of the farm-buildings, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the house; and he built, after my design, a bailiff's cottage. I showed this to an architect who was visiting me some time after, and asked him what he thought it had cost me. "Well," he said, "you did it cheaply if it cost so much," naming a sum rather more than three times what I had spent upon it.

The prices that well-to-do people pay for all sorts of house-work may often be called "fancy." I was once asked £80 for a space of plain surface-painting which I found, on measuring it up, to be worth £30. The man reduced his estimate at once to £50, on finding that I knew a little about the matter.

A great deal of expense in estate-work may be saved by little departures from the recognized methods of doing things. Thus, I set one of my men to paint about a mile and a half of wire and iron fence with gas tar, which is about one-twentieth the price of ordinary paint, and looks and preserves the iron just as well. He began the job with a brush, with which I suppose he would have taken three weeks or a month to do it; but I gave him a pair of leather gloves, a piece of stable-

sponge, and a slop-basin, and made him walk beside the wires or bars, drawing them through the sponge thoroughly soaked in gas tar, and holding the basin underneath as he went. In this way the work was done at the rate of something like half a mile of five-wired fence a day.

Another device, by which I saved, I should say, at least £300, was that of "puddling" the dams of my series of fish-ponds by horses instead of men. I found that one heavy horse would do the work of ten or twelve men, and would do it a great deal better; the weight of his hoof being vastly more powerful than the stroke of the usual puddling-rod.

MAKING GROUNDS.

Chapter V.

MAKING GROUNDS.

WHEN I had finished my house I was very well satisfied with it, though the alterations had involved about five times greater an expenditure—reckoning the value of the stone from my quarry—than I had at first intended. It was a fine block of building, of eighty feet frontage and sixty feet depth, and the exceedingly plain and solid Tudor of the new front—the main walls were three feet thick—harmonized very well with the many-roofed remainder of the old building at the back.

As soon as I had seen what the house was to be, I had set about making gardens and

arranging the ground about it to correspond; and this task occupied me delightfully and profitably in every way for the next eight years.

The character of the ground fortunately indicated very clearly the plan on which it should be laid out. The house looked south-east, the land rising gently behind and falling in front, till it rose again about half a mile off in a low hill, which cut off the sight of all that lay between my own land and the South Downs. The ground also fell on the left hand of the house down to a wooded glen, and rose again in a well-timbered hill, the crest of which formed the boundary in that direction of my land, which again rose gently on the right of the house, to where, about a quarter of a mile off, the high road ran through belts of my own wood.

Thus I had what is commonly considered a great advantage in a country-house—a fine and spacious home-view, in which nothing could be seen but my own property, and a noble distance of as sweet and gracious a line of hills as my eyes have ever beheld, in England or out of it.

In order to develop the advantage of the

ground, and before I could get a glimpse of the Downs, I had, however, to cut down and "grub" three belts of wood or "shaws" by which the meadows in front of the house were divided. When I had done this, leaving the best trees here and there for ornament, the house found itself standing in the midst of a beautiful little park of about sixty acres, abounding in fine well-grouped trees, and only interrupted in its clear sweeps of grass by the oak avenue to the house and the little oak wood, which, as I have said, skirted the approach on one side. I had to sow ten acres of arable land with grass in order to obtain this stretch of green. That is to say, I had to throw away ten acres of land for at least ten years; for, unless the ground is very rich, which in Sussex it rarely is, there is no chance of a "sward" under that time; though, of course, the eye has the required green from the first season.

On the right of the front of the house, and just where the trees of this avenue ceased, and beyond where the old stables had stood, was the large depression in the ground which I had from the first determined to turn into a sheet of water. It lay some twenty feet

below the fish-pond in the avenue wood, and, except in very dry weather, there was a continual slight stream passing through it, and thence, through a series of smaller depressions, into the glen about eighty feet below and on the left hand of the house.

The beginning of the first large depression was about 400 feet from the house, and considerably below its level. This hollow covered about two acres, and was about half surrounded by steep banks of oak-wood and underwood, on the right. I had all the underwood grubbed, left all the good trees, turfed the ground under them, and planted single pines, cedars, etc., where there were spaces on these banks; and then began the work of making the first great pond. It would require, I found, the removal of about 10,000 yards of earth in order to give the pond an average depth of between five and six feet. Had I put this job into the hands of a landscape-gardener and his contractor, it would have cost me about £500; but by doing it leisurely, using the labour of the men on the farm whenever they were not otherwise employed, and making the most economical arrangements for utilizing every yard of earth for islands, the neighbour-

ing terraces, and the filling-up of the quarry, and by constantly overseeing the operations myself, the work was done for less than half that sum.

This pond was a great success. I took care, in forming its outline, and in felling or leaving the timber between it and the house, to render nearly, but never quite, the whole of this sheet of water visible from any point of view ; so that its size, though great, looked as if it was much greater.

I solved the problem of how to make the banks of the islands able to resist the action of the water when driven by the wind, by making them up of alternate layers of earth and of the hundreds of young alder-trees which had grown on the site of the pond. The greater part of the mass of earth removed went to make a large horizontal terrace of the ground which had before sloped rapidly from the house; and from this terrace the pond was approached by a broad and solid double flight of water-stairs. As soon as the water was let in, it all looked as old as the avenue itself; for it was more than half surrounded, down to the water's edge, by timber of the same age.

I built a boat-house of heavy trunks and thick thatch in a little creek ; and, in order to please the trout, with which I meant to stock the pond, I brought the water of the old pond on the other side of the avenue, which was about twenty feet above the level of the new one, through a pipe, and had a fine jet ten or twelve feet high playing, whenever I liked, in a large basin cut off from the rest of the large pond by a foot-path. The trout liked the sound of this fountain so much in the droughty weather, in which alone it was played, that they would sometimes try to leap from the pond into the basin across the six-feet-broad path, upon which I sometimes found them skipping and jumping in the hope of falling in again on the right side.

From the end of the pond furthest from the house the land fell, as I have said, in a sort of small "ghyll" parallel to the house, down to the ravine on the left, between the wooded hill and the little park. Across this hollow, as soon as my big pond was finished, I set about throwing dams, so as to make four new ponds. I planted out the dams from the house-view, so that in four or five years the whole chain of five ponds looked

from our windows just like a stretch of broad winding river; though in reality there was a difference of about sixty feet between the lower and the upper water.

As I had no end of great stone blocks from my quarry, I joined these several ponds by falls, which when they were in full play, in wet weather, made quite an imposing display, viewed from the hill-side towards which they fell; for, thus seen, they looked like a single fall, with picturesque breaks; and I really think that there are not above one or two falls in all the "Lake country" that could beat my artificial one when the water came down at the rate of a hundred thousand gallons an hour, as it did after rain, or whenever I chose to "play" it by lifting the penstock of the upper pond, which, as it contained more than three million gallons, allowed of my showing off my "grandes eaux" for an hour or so, on festive occasions, without any material diminution of its contents.

I completed my line of fish-ponds by damming the trout-stream which ran through the ravine into which the other ponds emptied themselves. This last pond was entirely surrounded by wood and at a distance of about

half a mile from the house, from which it could not be seen. The whole quantity of water in the seven ponds was about six acres. The work, after the great pond was made, was comparatively simple, and, as I had all the puddling (which when done by men is very costly) done by horses, inexpensive; no ground having to be moved, except clay enough taken from the side of each new pond to make the dam between it and the next.

I ran invisible wire fences all round the space containing these ponds, and continued the fence so as to include the ground on which the house stood, and about seven acres more, which I laid out in garden, archery-ground and tennis-lawn, orchard, and shrubberies. The formation of these pleasure-grounds was a long and a rather expensive process. I have paid Messrs. Wood, of Maresfield, £180 for ornamental shrubs in one year.

It took many hundreds of loads of peat from the adjoining "forest" to make the soil suitable for several large banks of rhododendrons; and the deep trenching and enclosing of about an acre for kitchen-garden was a serious item of expense. Had I been

in a hurry about this work it would have cost far more; but nearly all the work, except the digging of the great pond, was done in the course of time by a gardener, with two permanent helps and occasional assistance from the home farm.

I completed the ornamental part of my work by making about five miles of paths through the shrubberies and woods. This was a slow but not a costly business, involving little more than cartage; for I had endless material in my stone-pits and the vast mass of sand and stone-chips which the masons and wallers left in the course of their work on the house, the terrace-walls, etc.

Nothing adds more effectively and less expensively to the dignity of a country place than abundant breadth of road and path. I was once staying at such a place, where the house had cost £120,000; and on asking the proprietor why his approach to the house had been made by him only thirteen feet wide, instead of thirty, he told me it had been done to save land. The road was a mile long; so that the difference would have been rather more than an acre and a half, of which the value was at most £50. Had I had the

making of the place, I would have spent £5,000, had it been necessary, rather than tolerated the perpetually obtrusive meanness of such an approach to such a mansion. My narrowest garden and wood paths allowed of three persons walking side by side comfortably. Fortunately the old approach was twenty-six feet wide; that is, wide enough but not at all too wide for the character of the house.

I applied to the formation of my lawns a principle which I drew from Mr. Penrose's valuable book, published by the Dilettante Society, in which he announces his discovery that there are no such things as truly horizontal lines in the greatest works of Greek architecture: the base lines, for instance, of the Parthenon rising towards the middle an inch or so in 100 ft. I had always discerned that there was something amiss about a quadrangular space of perfectly flat turf; and I found that this effect was wholly obviated by a rise towards the centre, so small that it could be felt rather than seen. I mentioned my application of this principle to a very well known architect, who at once acknowledged and adopted it in making the grounds of his own house.

I did not keep the place long enough to make it perfect by new stabling, but kept the old farm-stables which were behind the house and were good enough for my own use; but before I gave up my proprietorship I settled the site of the stables, and greatly improved the look and size of the mansion by adding to the north-west corner of it a massive gate-house, containing five new servants' rooms.

The entire work cost me, as I have stated, about £5,500, besides the produce of the stone-quarry, which cost me nothing but the working. And on comparing these results with the accounts of country gentlemen, friends of mine, who have done similar work by the wits of others instead of their own, I do not hesitate to say that £10,000 would not have covered the cost had it been done by contractors and landscape-gardeners.

FARMING AND SHOOTING.

Chapter VI.

FARMING AND SHOOTING.

MY home-farm was about 100 acres, which is a good size for a single-team farm. A farm of much less than this extent does not give enough work for a team (which in a hilly county like Sussex means three horses); and if it is much larger it ought to be about 200 acres, in order to maintain two teams; and so on.

When I came into possession I found a very intelligent bailiff on the spot: he had managed the farm for several years, and I engaged him to remain. I saw at once that my power of detailed control over this part of

my property must be comparatively small. The actual work of farming requires a life's experience, and an experience gained more or less in one locality.

All the gentlemen of my acquaintance who had home-farms had regarded them as expensive luxuries rather than as sources of income; and they were evidently more or less at the mercy of their bailiffs, upon whose accounts there could be no effectual check. They were all, also, addicted to "high farming," which, as far as I could understand, meant spending money without much regard to returns. I could not afford this; nor, indeed, should I have found any satisfaction in such farming had I been ever so rich. The capital which can profitably be put into a farm depends mainly on the character of the soil; and, from all I could learn from real farmers in the neighbourhood, £8 to £10 an acre was as much as my land would pay interest upon after paying rent.

A prosperous farmer in the immediate neighbourhood had offered me £150 a year for my home-farm. I communicated this offer to my bailiff; and told him that as long as my farm returned this rent and £50 a year

interest for capital I should farm it under his direction, but that if it failed to do that I should accept my neighbour for its tenant.

This arrangement was quite satisfactory to my bailiff; who, after returning me my stipulated minimum of rent and interest for about nine years, bought the goodwill of a "public." Before that I had had more than one indication of his flourishing condition. One year, after the sale of the wheat, I sent him with the money, £100, to the bankers' in the next town. On giving me the banking receipt, I observed that it was for £75, and pointed the fact out to him. "Oh," said he, "it's a mistake. That's for some money I put in myself. Here is the receipt for yours."

Although I did not know enough to take the principal part in the management of my farm, I became gradually sufficiently instructed to have a considerable hand in it; and common sense and a slight acquaintance with chemistry enabled me to make suggestions that were found useful.

For example, I pointed out how ruinous was the general practice of "spreading" farmyard manure, and still more of sowing guano, without regard to the weather—in a dry east

wind, perhaps; the greater part of the value of such manures consisting in volatile ammonia, which requires moisture to confine it and to carry it into the earth instead of the air. If manure were never spread except when the glass is rapidly falling, and guano never sown but when it is actually raining or between showers, the result would be a very sensible increase in profits.

In order to improve the "heart" of the soil, which had not been well used by my predecessor, I kept, for so small a farm, a large number of cattle, and "stall-fed" some of them with purchased food, which could be done then without loss; for in those days butchers gave about twopence a pound more for meat than they do now, when they put the twopence on to their customer which they take off from the farmers.

I am not much of a politician; but it has often occurred to me that, if the paternal government under which we now live would pass a measure to the effect that the *superfluous* profits of butchers should be confiscated as some other less questionable rights have lately been, the national debt might be extinguished with the proceeds in one generation.

A considerable proportion of my sheep and cattle were bought by the butcher who supplied the house with meat. He gave me 9*d.* or 9½*d.* for the carcass of a sheep, and I paid him the same price for legs, shoulders, and loins; the "offal," or "fifth quarter," consisting of head, skin, etc.—worth 8*s.* or 9*s.* a sheep—having been, up to that date, about fifteen years ago, considered a butcher's fair profit. My butter, which was made in the house by a servant who had been a Yorkshire dairymaid, fetched 3*d.* a pound more than the butter of any other farm in the neighbourhood. My bailiff never had to send anything from the farm to a distant market; purchasers always coming to him to buy. This was in many respects a convenience; but once it put my wife into a position of some difficulty. She inadvertently complained to the butcher of some beef he had supplied, and received in reply the unanswerable remark, "'Twas your own beast, ma'am."

Of all my undertakings, the least profitable I found to be pheasant-raising. Yet I was in a way bound in honour to breed them, as numbers of them came on to my grounds from the adjacent woods of a gentleman who

bred and preserved them; and I could not, with a comfortable conscience, indulge in the inevitable temptation to shoot them unless I had some of my own to stray in my neighbour's way. The gamekeepers of other estates supplied me with eggs from 36*s.* to 48*s.* a dozen; but by the time I had bagged the birds out of them they had cost me at least £2 each.

The place was not big enough to keep a trained gamekeeper, and I lost more from early deaths and perils from vermin, etc., than from poachers. One day a peacock killed a whole brood of young pheasants; thirty or forty died at another time because the man whose business it was to rear them was laid up for a few days and some slight error was made in their food.

One of my servants, at whose mistakes I was obliged to wink because he was on the whole too valuable to be parted with, used to be in doubt about the species of these birds, and this cost me many of them. It was reported to me that his little girl, seeing some of them in the larder, exclaimed "Oh, the pretty pigeons!" and, on being told that they were not pigeons, she replied that she was

quite sure they were, because her father had told her they were pigeons. On comparing notes, however, with one of my neighbours, an old squire with a large estate, who was believed to spend a thousand a year on his preserves, I was much comforted by finding that his pheasants cost him, before they came to the gun, nearly as much as mine did.

Here I may notice a curious psychological phenomenon connected with the possession of land with its privileges. I am naturally, like Sir Thomas Browne, of an exceedingly mild disposition; and, like him, do not sincerely hate any person or thing except the People, and them only in the aggregate that spells itself with a great P; nevertheless any injurious trespass on my bounds, especially when it related to game, inflamed me with passions of which I had supposed myself incapable.

A neighbour who had some land on one of my borders, and who did not breed pheasants, would sometimes be unable to withdraw his dogs from my woods while he was skirting them with his gun. This excited, and to this day excites in me feelings of the most dire description.

Again, there were six brothers, huge fellows and notorious night poachers, and leading members of the local Poachers' Club, which paid the fines of its subscribers. The game-keepers in the neighbourhood were supposed to be shy of these men—all six of whom, by the by, worked at once for me in digging the great pond. Once or twice on moonlight nights I heard shots in the wood nearest my house; and as the man who looked after my game did not like going alone, I set out with him with a brace of heavy double-barrelled pistols, too much enraged to feel any fear; though in my cooler moments I do not think I am unduly insensitive to danger. In my own exculpation I may say that I have seen similar signs of the survival of the instincts of the hunting savage in some of the most thoroughbred gentlemen of my acquaintance.

The extent of my ground and the quantity of game upon it abundantly satisfied my sporting requirements. I could never see the fun of battue shooting; but a walk with my dog of two or three hours in a tract of the most lovely country in England, enlivened by an occasional shot and crowned with a bag of a brace or two of birds and two or three

rabbits, was a real pleasure, and I did not envy my neighbour whose preserves cost him a thousand a year.

The prime duty of guarding one's game gave rise to several pathetic incidents. The execution of favourite cats—who always took, after a year or two, to poaching—was a sad necessity; but it was generally concealed from the household. My groom had a little pet dog, who also took to running too far afield. I told him he must get rid of it, and he acceded with perfect good-humour. The next day I observed a row of miniature joints of meat hanging up in the stable. The man had killed and cut up his pet for food for the ferrets, which were kept in a box for the destruction of rabbits.

Another distressing choice I had to make between duty and inclination occurred when my fish-ponds, having become thickly stocked, were found out by the herons, which abounded in the Sussex marshes about sixteen miles off. They gorged and carried off in their pouches such quantities of my trout and other fish that I had to elect between these and them, and I resolved to sacrifice the picturesque to the useful. I tried in vain to get within shot of

them, so I set rat-traps in a sandy shallow, which was patterned all over by their foot-prints. I thus caught four and scared away the others. In two cases, the capture having been made with only a slight injury to their toes, I kept the birds in my aviary, and gave them as much of the coarser fish as could be consumed on the premises. They took quite easily to their captivity, and would stand for days together each on one leg, digesting fish often pretty nearly as big as their own bodies.

FISH-PONDS AND AVIARIES.

Chapter VII.

FISH-PONDS AND AVIARIES.

WHEN the digging of my great pond was finished, and the water of the old upper pond was turned into it through the "penstock," it was a great delight to see what had been hitherto an unsightly hollow converted at once into a beautiful sheet of water, which, from the indentations and irregularities of its shores and the impossibility of seeing it from any point all at one time, looked very much larger than it really was.

This little lake seemed at once as old as the oaks which adorned its variously elevated banks down to the water's edge. The

quantity of water which already passed through it from the other ponds and down through the site of the chain of lower ponds was amply enough to keep it fresh and clear. But, for the benefit of the fish to come, I turned the surface drainage of about sixty acres of land, which had hitherto run off by other channels, into this course, and thus obtained such a supply that one day's hard rain would fill the entire lake to the brim after it had been emptied through its penstock into the lower ponds.

The next step was to put in the fish. There was a small but very deep pond on another part of the estate, in which I found eight or ten large carp, each from six to twelve pounds in weight. These I put into the great pond, so that I might not have to wait two or three years for the pleasure of seeing the backs of big fish gliding near the surface, or resting under the water-lilies, on hot summer days. I next dammed the trout-stream on the other side of the turnpike road, and took out in one day 700 trout of from one to eight ounces in weight, by far the greater number being of the smaller figure.

I lost nearly all these fish by not being at

that time aware that air is more necessary than water for trout. In bringing them from the stream, which was nearly a mile from the pond, I used a large garden water-cart nearly filled with water. A year or two afterwards I brought over a large number of trout from the same stream, in the same vessel, without losing one of them, by taking the precaution to give them only just enough water to cover them; the shallow fluid being kept well aërated by being dashed continually from side to side in the jolting of the cart on the road.

A neighbouring farmer, who knew I wanted to stock my ponds, one day brought me more than a hundredweight of large tench, many weighing from one and a half to two pounds. These also I put into my great pond; but soon found that they spoilt the water by incessantly ploughing up the bottom and banks with their noses, like so many pigs. I therefore emptied the pond and took out the tench and the carp, which I suspected of eating my small fish, and put the tench into the pond out of which I had taken the carp, and the carp into the upper pond in the avenue wood; restocking the great pond entirely with very small fish—trout, bream, roach, chub, and

carp. They would all have gone into a quart pot; and three years afterwards, when I again emptied the pond, I took out between three and four hundredweight—all from this small beginning. This prodigious growth was mainly owing to the ground being new, and thus affording a far greater amount of food than an old pond of corresponding size would have supplied.

I found I had made a great mistake in putting in bream, through my simplicity in reading an old French proverb—"He who has bream in his pond never wants a welcome for his friends"—in its literal rather than its sarcastic meaning; the bream being, indeed, almost the only one among the ordinary fresh-water fish of which no skill in cooking can disguise the coarseness. We had at one time a clever Italian cook, and it was wonderful what good dishes he made of tench or roach; but the bream, even under his hands, never lost its reminiscence of mud.

The trout, though they would not breed in my big pond notwithstanding the sandy and pebbly shallows I had prepared for their use, grew at a much greater rate than they would have done in their native stream. After two

years I had the pleasure of hooking trout of three-quarters of a pound, which proved very good eating; and it was beautiful to see them, as we could from the house, shooting at least six feet out of the water, which they did especially in droughty weather, when they appeared to be impatient of the comparatively small supply of fresh water.

I distributed the immense haul made at the first fishing of the great pond among the series of smaller ponds, which were thus thickly stocked at once; and to these I added the contents of one or two other ponds, which neighbouring proprietors had allowed me to empty. In fact, these ponds were thus overstocked. My boys could hook forty pounds in a morning. I therefore got a lot of small jack, of about half a pound, and put a few of them in each of the lesser ponds.

It is a proverb that big fish will only grow in a big pond; and it is true of most fish, but not of pike. I put five half-pound fish into the deep little outlying pool, into which I have said I had placed the tench. Two years afterwards there was a great drought and a fiercely hot summer; so that the water of this pool, which had been an old marl-pit, be-

came so unwholesome that one day they were all found lying dead on the surface. They weighed from seven to twelve pounds each, and still the pool remained thickly stocked with tench.

The pike throve in a no less satisfactory manner in the other ponds, and were much better sport to catch, and much better food to eat, than the bream and Prussian carp upon which they chiefly fed. Nothing comes amiss to a pike, and quantity is as little regarded by him as quality. I once found lying in a semi-torpid state at the edge of the water what seemed to be a big fish with two tails. It was a pike in the act of gorging a bream that was actually broader than himself. Frogs are his chief delight; but among these he sometimes finds his match. One day I saw a shapeless mass rolling itself about in the water, and, on drawing it to shore with a long hop-pole, I found it to be a jack of about three pounds with a frog perched firmly on the back of its head. The frog had scratched out the fish's eyes, and had stuck its elbows so strongly into the head of its prey that I had almost to break its legs in order to get it off. Isaac Walton says he had heard of such a

thing, but seemed scarcely to believe it. I saw it.

My fish had plenty to eat besides each other; and here, by the way, I should say that it is quite a mistake to suppose that pike alone will eat their own kind. I believe that all fish will eat their offspring while they are small and tender; trout and several other kinds certainly will. Boiled "graves," mixed with clay and rolled into balls, was what I chiefly fed my fish on. But a dead sheep, or any meat-offal, is welcome, and will help most pond-fish to fatten.

Pike prefer live things. They would rather have a silver spoon or a piece of coloured rag that looks lively than a dinner of the best dead meat. They are very fond of live birds. My ducklings were often sucked in by them, as were the young of the coots which used to breed by my ponds; and a swan has been known to put her head down the throat of a pike, never to come out again alive. It is necessary to take care how you handle them, for they will bite at your hand like a dog when they are being carried to the larder; and their bite is far worse than a dog's. In floods some of my fish would get over the

dams, into the trout-stream beyond, and thence into a little river that runs into the sea. I fancy that I have recognized some of my big bream—which could scarcely have been grown in the stream—more than twenty miles from my fish-ponds.

An otter, who had his abode in the neighbouring "ghyll," once or twice visited the ponds and left curious signs of his extravagant meal. One morning I found about twenty pounds weight of large fish dead on the bank, nothing of them having been eaten but a little piece out of each shoulder.

Between the back of the range of the old farm-stabling, behind the houses and a very high stone wall which I built as a screen to keep these stables out of sight from the gardens, I made a great aviary by simply giving the whole space a roof of wire netting. I planted this enclosure with evergreens and divided it into three compartments with communicating doors, and filled it with birds of all kinds and sizes, chiefly such as belonged to the country—herons, pheasants, hawks, owls, ravens, rooks, hooded and common crows, jackdaws, and several others.

At first there was a good deal of fighting;

but I gradually found which of the birds would live best together, and kept them in separate divisions. Birds, however, would sometimes begin to fight after having lived together for months on amicable terms—made irritable, I suppose, like people on long voyages, by want of room for their feelings. The hawks never interfered with the doves and other birds, their natural prey. I suppose that they had not space enough to swoop upon them with effect; and the owls, a pair of the smallest sort, never did any murder, except once when they were found in deadly battle with a huge rat, which they succeeded in killing.

On account of the almost natural freedom enjoyed by the birds in their large enclosure, they displayed many curious habits and idiosyncrasies which would have enchanted a naturalist. Indeed, I should have to write a new "Natural History of Selborne" if I were to note all the interesting and, as far as I know, hitherto unnoted facts about birds, beasts, and fishes, which I observed during my life in Sussex. Among the most amusing of these was the good and orderly understanding which seemed at once to establish itself

among the various members of the crow tribe, who were all kept together. For example, the first time a hooded crow was introduced into the cage, it seemed to be acknowledged that he had precedence of the rook at the dinner-table; the latter actually offering a piece of raw meat I had given him to the former before he thought of helping himself.

Curious platonic relations were established between birds of the most different character. A silver pheasant devoted himself, for instance, in the most absurdly chivalrous manner, to the protection of a solitary jackdaw who had built her nest and laid vain eggs in a hole under the eaves of the old stabling.

The only serious tragedy which occurred among the birds was the death of a heron, who was the pride of the aviary. A peacock, who was spoiling the high grass of the meadows by dragging his heavy tail all about it, was sentenced to confinement till the hay should be cut. He no sooner saw the heron than he sprang over his head and pierced his skull with a single stroke of his spur.

The place was now "made." My shrubberies and plantations had grown wonderfully, owing chiefly to the deep trenching of the

earth in which I had planted them. Some of them at the end of fifteen years were nearly thirty feet high, and everything looked a hundred years old; even the house having a really ancient appearance, on account of a plainness and massiveness almost unknown in modern house architecture.

If the walls of a house are three feet thick it is sure to look well, however unlearned the architecture; but I had had the good fortune to get the services of an architect who, whatever had been his mistakes about expense, knew his business as an artist as well as any man in England; and he and I had always been at one about the prime necessity of very thick walls, not only for comfort but effect.

It is surprising that this point is so little understood in country-house building. In a £10,000 house the difference of expense between walls of two and three feet in thickness is a mere trifle—three or four hundred pounds; but the difference in effect is quite incalculable.

CONCLUSION.

Chapter VIII.

CONCLUSION.

THIS last chapter of my country experiences I devote to an account of various, at the time, unconsidered trifles, which would not come under any of the foregoing headings, and which, indeed, have but a very accidental connection with my main subject.

The house, being between four and five hundred feet above the sea-level and having a very wide horizon, was quite an observatory for meteorological phenomena, some of which —whirlwinds and waterspouts among the rest —seemed to have a special liking for our neighbourhood.

There was one hailstorm quite unlike anything I have ever before or since seen or heard of. The afternoon was fine and quiet, when I saw a dense grey veil, apparently a furlong or so in breadth, approaching the house from the south. It was about a mile off when I first noticed it, as I knew by its obscuring in its course certain objects which lay at that distance. Sunshine was on either side of it. In a few minutes it reached the house. There was one clap of thunder, whether at the time of its arrival or a little while before I do not recollect. For somewhat less than two minutes the hail came down, with a sudden but not very violent blast of wind, in such quantities that nothing could be seen thirty yards from our windows. In those two minutes my rain-gauge measured nearly one inch and a quarter —that is to say, about as much as falls in an ordinary heavy downpour of twenty-four hours' duration.

The forms of the hailstones and their way of falling were not less remarkable than their quantity. About half of them were ordinary hailstones as to spherical shape and construction in concentric layers, only they were about the size of common marbles; the other moiety

were clear discs of ice of about the diameter of a penny piece and twice as thick, perfectly well-formed, and in numberless cases having small projections on one or both sides, which made them look like the covers of small stew-pans with their handles. Here and there there was a mass of clear ice of a different form. The largest I picked up was about the size of a bantam's egg, hollow and formed with spiral ridges. I did not weigh any of these hailstones; but a neighbour told me that he had picked up eight which weighed an average of two ounces each. I do not think that I saw any of more than half that weight.

But what surprised me more than their size was their way of coming down. In my eagerness to examine the stones, I hastened out of the window from which I was looking without my hat on. I felt the blows of the ice-balls almost as little as if they had been snow-flakes; no glass was broken, no trees or shrubs injured; and a friend who was driving two high-spirited horses through the thickest of it, told me that they took no notice of it whatever, though he should have been sorry to have been driving them through an ordinary hailstorm.

The only way I can see of accounting for this extraordinary fact is the supposition that these masses of ice were formed and sustained in a funnel of wind, of which the extreme point or nose did not reach the earth, although it passed close above it; so that when the weight of the stones overcame the sustaining force of the hurricane they had only a hundred or two of feet to fall through. I leave it to scientific men to guess, if they can, why half the hailstones took the form of the covers of stew-pans.

A scarcely less unusual freak of the wind happened once, about one or two o'clock in the morning, when I was lying awake and listening—if the expression may be allowed—to the wonderful stillness of the night in that sparsely populated country. Without the slightest warning or stir in the plantations near, the house was softly and mightily struck, as by an india-rubber ball of the size of a small planet. Though the walls were three feet thick, they rocked with the blow; and complete stillness instantaneously succeeded. The next morning the bailiff told me that many trees in the wood nearest the house had been struck and split by lightning; and, on going

to see, I found a part of the wood strewn with great arms and branches, which had no doubt been brought low by the sweep of that solitary blast.

Having always been addicted to lonely night-walks in the country, I have seen many more things in the sky than are dreamed of by such as never stir out after dinner. The aurora borealis is a far commoner thing, even in the south of England, than is supposed; and I have seen it scores of times for every once that it has been reported by newspaper-writing sky-gazers.

I have twice seen the ghostly quivering splendour arching the *south* instead of the north. One of these occasions was in the year of the siege of Paris. About eleven o'clock the show began in the north with a fine eruption of blue and red shafts, radiating from a low arch of darkness. In about half an hour the entire sky—north, south, east, and west—became one huge tent of quivering crimson flame, with the exception of a little black circlet right overhead, from which the light all flowed, like a veil from a diadem. The lustre was so great that everything in the near landscape could be clearly seen, and

the chain of ponds looked just like great pools of blood. Before midnight the redness had left the north, but it remained for some time unfaded in the southern sky. Everybody on the place was up and watching it.

Towards the conclusion of the spectacle, I was standing near where my bailiff and gardener were talking about it. One said to the other, "They're getting it under now." "Getting what under?" I asked. "Paris, sir, as the Germans have been a burning."

Some time after the large terrace with its enclosed lawn was formed, it was found impossible to keep the turf in anything like order, on account of the immense number of worm-casts thrown up from the new earth, which was several feet deep. After trying various expedients in vain, I hit by mere accident upon a very effectual one. I noticed that a spot, on which some coarse creosote had been spilt the day before, was entirely covered with dead worms, which had apparently sought the air in order to avoid the penetrating odour. I therefore had a large square of old sheeting moistened with creosote, and left it spread all night on a corner of the lawn. In the morning it was lifted, and there appeared no grass,

but what looked like an immense slice of raw meat. The unsightly mass was shovelled up and thrown to the fish; and the turf below, though slightly bleached, was not injured, but recovered its colour in a day or two. The process being repeated wherever it was required, the earth was thoroughly purged from worms, which never again made their appearance in inconvenient numbers.

When describing the digging of my big pond I omitted to mention a circumstance which may be interesting to geologists and mineralogists. I observed that a barrow of a kind of loose shale which had been thrown into the quarry, in the course of filling it up from the pond, contained quantities of small light-coloured garnets. I spoke of this to the man who was superintending the work, and he told me that he had buried many loads of them in the same hole.

In or near the same spot, and in the same kind of earth, I found a little seam of coal. It was about half an inch in breadth. I mentioned these facts to a friend who professed some knowledge of geology and mineralogy (which I do not), and he seemed to think them very anomalous and unaccountable for by the

geological character of the locality. There, however, are the facts.

I was more than once witness to a dangerous peculiarity in the manners of weasels, with which all strollers in woods and out-of-the-way walks should be acquainted. They will not get out of your way, and consider it a deadly affront if you do not get out of theirs. One day I saw three of them playing in the middle of the path I had to go over. I fortunately knew of their custom of running up an intruder instead of away from him, and of the sure instinct which guides them to the largest blood-vessels of all who offend them. I therefore stood still within two or three yards of them. They looked at me and went on playing.

I had with me an old retriever very learned in all knowledge befitting his station. I called him and showed the weasels to him. With an apparent sense of the gravity of the situation he approached them carefully; they, as usual, disdained to fly. But the dog was too quick to allow of their pursuing their ordinary bloodthirsty tactics; for, making a sudden pounce upon them, they were all dead before they had time to think of his jugular. Their

wickedness is perfectly inhuman. It is not so much that they love to feast on blood as to rejoice in its flux; and their insensibility to danger exceeds courage and culminates in stupidity.

The only creature I know of which equals the weasel in its contempt of all that interferes with the satisfaction of its ferocious passions is the water-devil—I do not know its scientific name. He is a little fiendish-looking thing, about as big as a shrimp; with two horns projecting from the side of his head and meeting in front, constituting a pair of powerful circular pliers, with which he seizes his prey and holds it while sucking its juices.

Once, as I was skirting the large pond in my boat, I saw one of these creatures at the brink, with a new-born jack rather bigger than himself in his grip. I took him up by the tail, and made him drop his prey into the bottom of the boat. But his mind was not in the least disturbed by the thought of what had got hold of his tail, but only of the little wounded fish which had been forced from his clutches. Over and over again I held him near the little fish; and each time he eagerly grasped and held it till it was again forced from

him. I finally rewarded him for his devilry by abandoning him to himself and the satisfaction of his bad passions.

As weasels and water-devils represent the extreme of wickedness in nature, so doves and dormice exhibit her sweetest innocence. I have sat near a nest of dormice in a wood, and the parents have come and eaten strawberries out of my hand without any show of fear.

I was once praising my especial pets to a French Catholic lady, and related to her an impromptu apologue of how, when Adam and Eve were eating the apple, the dormouse said to himself, "I should like a bite of that!" and, in order to avoid temptation, covered his eyes with his tail. I had no idea my story would be taken *au sérieux;* but a week or two afterwards a long article on the subject, by the lady's friend, Louis Veuillot, appeared in the *Univers*, entitled "A Pious English Catholic Tradition."

Before my ponds had been made more than two or three years, very large freshwater mussels appeared here and there on their brinks. They seemed to exercise some occult mode of fascination upon the little fish.

I have often watched small roach gradually approaching the half-open shells, and enter them as of free will, only sideways, not to appear again.

I must close my notes of natural phenomena with one or two anecdotes of my own species.

The first applicant I had, after having made it known that I wanted to part with my estate, was a wealthy City man. He made many knowing inquiries of me, with an air of being quite up to country matters. The last was, "Aw—aw—how many haystacks does the farm produce?" I replied that it depended somewhat on their size. He seemed dissatisfied that there should be any such contingency in the matter, and declined to purchase.

The next inquirer was a man who owned an estate in Australia somewhat larger than Sussex. He looked at two or three of the principal rooms of the house, the gardens, and the fish-ponds; seemed immensely delighted; said he would write to me next day; and was driving off, when he jumped up in his carriage and said he need not wait, but would write an agreement to purchase at once, and at my own price—which was two thousand pounds

more than I afterwards asked and got for it; for I did not sell until the depreciation in landed property had begun to set in.

Having myself suffered, in former days, from acts done in such fits of enthusiasm, I told him I would not sell to him until he had slept on it and looked a little more into particulars. Next day he had thought better of it, and only proposed to take a long lease.

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